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ABSTRACT

The handbook offers strategies for being a successful advocate for appropriate gifted education. Each of six sections focuses on a specific strategy. These include: championing the cause by being knowledgeable and refuting myths; aiding in identification by knowing characteristics of the gifted and placement criteria, surveying local programs to determine what services are provided and what is lacking; offering support to programs through participation, contributions, and by organizing and lobbying; publicizing student achievements through media exposure; and evaluating the local effort in view of other programs. A final section offers notable quotes intended to inspire the advocate. (SW)

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Handbook for Advocacy of Gifted Education

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Frances S. Dubner

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional
Children (62nd, Washington, DC, April 23-27, 1984)

for
Tamara, Mike
and other gifted
students

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Introduction

The Gifted Child movement offers one of those rare opportunities to struggle against the superior odds of the status quo with only a handful of allies, but convinced in your mind that your cause is just, and that the ultimate outcome is certain victory. (Gowan, J.C., 1979)

It is for you, the believer, and your "handful of allies" that this handbook is written. It is for children, parents, educators and others in the community who believe that gifted children deserve an education appropriate to their needs and abilities. It is for advocates who are willing to work toward achieving that educational goal that this book is designed.

Advocacy, at the least, requires conviction; at its best, it requires action. That action can be individual, group or organizational. It can involve human or material resources. Its form and nature are subject to the needs and capabilities of your specific school and community. Its character will be determined by the ideas and imagination, the resourcefulness and energy of you and your co-advocates.

There is no sure-fire formula for successful advocacy. There are only suggested strategies that you can use, adapt and arrange--strategies to serve as catalysts to effect the desired change.

This handbook presents six strategies. They include

championing the cause by being knowledgeable. As an advocate, you should be able to refute the myths about giftedness as well as be aware of the rights due these children. As an advocate, you should help in the identification process by knowing the characteristics of the gifted and placement criteria of the school system that serves those children. By surveying local programs, you should learn what services are provided and what needs remain unsatisfied. Once program needs are discovered, you should offer support through participation and contributions and through organizing and lobbying. Student achievements should be publicized through media exposure and through creative opportunities. Finally, as an advocate you should evaluate the local effort in light of what is happening elsewhere and what ultimately is possible in your particular school and community.

These, then, are six strategies to help you determine the best plan of attack for success. You are challenged to create the formula most effective for your specific situation. As encouragement in this major undertaking, the handbook includes a section entitled "Notable Quotes." Words, carefully chosen, can serve as beacons to inspire you in your advocacy endeavor.



Champion the Cause

Refute the myths.

Be aware of the myths that surround the subject of gifted education. Each misconception must be addressed and dispelled with convincing data.

Myth A: It is undemocratic to give special attention to the gifted.

Answer this argument of elitism by emphasizing the idea that a free and democratic America grants each person the right to an education appropriate to his or her needs and ability.

Myth B: The gifted will do well on their own.

This "cream rises to the top" argument is frequently given. However, a National Education Association study made in 1978 reports that, in fact, many gifted students do not succeed within the present academic setting and drop out or fail to continue their education beyond high school. The gifted do need special educational support that meets their unique learning needs.

Myth C: The gifted should strive to be part of the mainstream.

This argument, which can be called the "cult of the average," like the first, is actually contrary to the American way which historically has rewarded Yankee ingenuity, Horatio Alger success, and the resourceful independence of the pioneer, the gold miner and the entrepreneur. Cultivating individual talents reaps benefits for the society in general.

Myth D: Gifted students in special programs will have emotional and social problems.

Extensive research cited in the NEA study (1978) reports that "the gifted individual is not harmed socially, emotionally, or physically by being placed in a special program designed to help him or her achieve full potential. On the contrary, many educators believe that emotional problems may occur more readily if the gifted individual is not placed in a special program."

Demand rights.

Public Law 94-142, passed in 1975 and implemented in 1978, mandates an individualized learning plan for all exceptional children. Though initially targetted for the handicapped, the law now applies to the gifted as well. These students are legally guaranteed the right to an education appropriate to their needs and abilities. Insist that gifted children receive their due.

AID IN IDENTIFICATION



Aid in Identification

Know the characteristics of the gifted.

In her study of the childhood biographies of 100 geniuses, Catherine Cox Miles (1954) cited these common characteristics: independence of thought; perceptiveness; understanding; strength of memory; originality; creativeness; depth of understanding; trustworthiness; conscientiousness; strength of influence on others; persistence; devotion to distant goals; desire to excel. There are other lists obtainable from a variety of sources.

Know placement criteria.

Since criteria vary from state to state, consult your State Department of Education (Special Education division), your local superintendent, gifted coordinator or teacher of the gifted to learn the specific guidelines for placement in a program.

Provide evidence.

Schools give standardized tests to measure ability and achievement. Test results are used for identification purposes. On occasion, perceptive teachers can identify gifted student candidates for the program. However, parent and peer nominations can usually be more helpful and accurate. These nominations can consist of anecdotal

information, reports of observed behavior, biographical and interest inventories, or presentation of original objects and other products made by the child. The more comprehensive the data, the easier the identification and placement procedures.

In the identification process, insist that a combination of approaches be used. Often, culture-biased tests are used in the selection process resulting in the exclusion of worthy candidates. In fact, researchers recommend a two-stage process of selection: first, a screening through group testing, teacher nominations and peer recommendations. Second, a screening committee would examine a smaller number of students for individualized review. These students would include those with language problems, culturally-different backgrounds and records of school discontent. The screening committee should base a placement decision on the student's indication of potential rather than past accomplishments.

SURVEY SCHOOL AND SYSTEM PROGRAMS



Survey School and System Programs

Learn what the school and system provide.

After the child is identified as gifted, what then? Visit the school to learn what educational program, if any, is provided. If possible, learn the educational philosophy of the administration and faculty and their attitudes toward gifted education. Determine whether there are opportunities for acceleration, ability grouping, or enrichment. If none of these experiences are provided, what arrangements are made for the gifted?

Determine the ways needs are met.

What special provisions for gifted students are made at your school? Are there curricular adaptations? (acceleration, grouping in special classes, enrichment) Is your school offering part of a comprehensive program for the gifted? (K through 12) Is there a certified teacher of the gifted? What guidance services are available to the gifted? (college and vocational counseling, scholarship advisement, personal counseling) How effective are student selection procedures? (multi-dimensional criteria, testing personnel, annual review) How accessible are library, computer and media resources? (unlimited, frequent or infrequent access) How extensive is the gifted program? (summer, Saturdays, remediation, advancement) How are community resources used? (field trips, guest speakers) How are program efforts evaluated?

SUPPORT YOUR PROGRAM



Support Your Program

As an active advocate you can support your program by participating, contributing, organizing and lobbying.

Participate.

Which role can you play? Specify.

Mentor (supervise and instruct individual students)
 Teacher (teacher's aide, lecturer)
 Materials developer
 Guest speaker
 Chaperone or chauffeur
 Publicist
 Other

Contribute.

How can you contribute? Specify.

Materials (books, subscriptions, equipment, furniture)
 Money (for tournaments, scholarships, projects)
 Ideas (places to visit, projects to undertake)
 Other

Organize.

How can you wield organizational clout? Specify.

Join a gifted group if one already exists.
 Form a school support group.
 Start a gifted organization if one does not exist.

Lobby.

How can you lobby for gifted education? Specify.

Contact your local legislator concerning gifted education.
 Express your beliefs to those on the state level.
 Whenever possible, communicate your support for gifted education.

PUBLICIZE ACHIEVEMENTS



Publicize Achievements

"Media-size" accomplishments.

Utilize local media to advertise the achievements of your gifted students and the activities of your program. Favorable publicity goes far in bolstering a program and helping it to become stronger.

Prepare a media utilization plan.

A systematic approach to publicity and media coverage is helpful in your advocacy effort. A suggested media utilization plan follows.

Media Utilization Plan

I What items do you deem newsworthy?

- a. Academic (scholarships, test achievements, honors earned)
- b. Performance (speaking contests, music recitals, art exhibitions, chess tournaments)
- c. Human interest (service at senior citizen centers, community involvement)

II To whom should the news item be given?

- a. Clearance with individual school and system
- b. Local newspapers, radio, t.v.
- c. P.T.A.

III How should the story be packaged?

- a. Newspaper article with picture
- b. t.v. or radio feature
- c. Public presentation (such as at a P.T.A. meeting)

IV What follow-up to the publicity should occur?

- a. Copies to school board and superintendent
- b. Copies to legislators, especially state education committee members
- c. Copies to the subjects in the news story and their parents

EVALUATION



V What are the names and addresses of the media sources?

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone</u>
a. Newspaper		
b. T.v. station		
c. Radio station		
d. Legislator		

Evaluate

Learn what is happening elsewhere.

What are the programs like in your neighboring counties? states? What are current practices as described in newspapers, professional journals, educational conferences? Try to become informed about "the state of the art" in gifted education.

Assess your local program.

In light of what you have learned of what is done elsewhere, determine what needs to be done in your own school and program. Draw up a list of goals with priorities for which you and your co-advocates can work.

NOTABLE QUOTES



NOTABLE QUOTES

"There is no investment in American education more cost-effective than money spent on the education of this country's most valuable, yet often neglected, national resources--our gifted and talented children."

Klein, R.D. and Lyon, Jr., H.C.,
1982

"The general objects. . .are to provide an education adapted to the years, to the capacity, and the condition of every one, and directed to their freedom and happiness. . . .We hope to avail the state of those talents which nature has sown as liberally among the poor as the rich, but which perish without use, if not sought for and cultivated."

Jefferson, Thomas

". . .the world. . .is only beginning to see that the wealth of a nation consists more than in anything else in the number of superior men that it harbors."

James, Wm., 1912

"One of the heaviest responsibilities in education is to do justice to exceptional minds, remembering that they may emerge in any place, at any time, and in any body."

Hight, G., 1954

". . .as a result of far-reaching social and technological development in our society, we are forced to search for talent and to use it effectively."

Gardner, J.W., 1961

"Education in the long run is an affair that works itself out between the student and his opportunities."

James, Wm., 1912

"But most of all, more than protection from active discouragement, much more than rewards and praise, the gifted child needs scope, material on which his imagination can feed, and opportunities to exercise it. He needs inconspicuous access to books, museums, instruments, paints, ideas, a chance to feed himself with the accumulated heritage from the genius of other ages."

Mead, M., 1954

"Special attention to proper nurturing is the only hope of conserving the gifted child's high abilities for the ultimate benefit of society."

Hildreth, G.H., 1952

"We must repeat again and again that it is NOT un-American to have ideas, it is NOT dangerous to think, it is NOT undemocratic to be intelligent beyond one's fellows! What I am saying is, of course, that the idea of America, properly understood, has within it an inherent desire and need for trained intelligence, that it is an essential part of our tradition to have a democracy of excellence. There is no reason to feel that the democratic ideal and intellectual distinction are necessarily at odds, one with the other."

Hamilton, T.H., 1964

"The gifted individual who influences the world for good is a person with the character traits, and integrity, the human sympathy and sense of social responsibility that lead him to place the welfare of mankind ahead of personal ambition."

Hildreth, G.H., 1952

"America's greatest resource is her bright children. The need today is to discover every bright child, challenge him to work to his full capacity, and see that he receives all the education from which he can profit."

Cutts, N.E. and Moseley, N.
1957

"When a true genius appears in this world, you may know that the dunces are all in confederacy against him."

Swift, Jonathan

"The Creator has withheld from Man the shark's teeth, the bird's wings, the elephant's trunk and the hound's or horse's racing feet. The creative power planted in a minority of mankind has to do duty for all the marvelous physical assets that are built into every specimen of Man's non-human fellow creatures. If society fails to make the most of this one human asset, or if, worse still, it perversely sets itself to stifle it, Man is throwing away his birthright of being the lord of creation and is condemning himself to be, instead, the least effective species on the face of this planet."

Toynbee, A., 1968

"Democracy is not to be conceived of as an invitation to share a common mediocrity, but as a system that allows each to express and live up to the special excellence that is in him."

ROCKEFELLER REPORT, 1958

"Education for the gifted and talented has the potential to provide the impetus for a transformation in American education which will produce a sense of achievement in students, provide standards of excellence for all students, encourage individualized instruction, and offer a catalytic example that can make a difference in the education of all children."

Klein, R.D. and Lyon, Jr., H.C.,
1982

". . .in the present international tug of war survival itself may depend upon making the most effective use of the nation's intellectual resources."

Wolfle, D., 1954

". . .the strongest premise on which to build a program for the gifted is that every student has a right to an education that is 'appropriate' for her or him. This principle applies to all students, from the most handicapped child to the most gifted. To provide for the gifted, therefore, is not undemocratic, as is so often implied; it is in keeping with the best traditions of American schools."

Trezise, R.L., 1976

"The talented child has often been the forgotten child and the underachiever, despite his extraordinary potential because he becomes bored with unchallenging programs."

Javits, J., 1969

"Follow-up studies of the gifted indicate that they are the persons who make our great scientific and medical discoveries, write our great music and books, and help us to solve our social problems. To shortchange these potential contributors is not only state and national suicide, but conceivably a harbinger of global atrophy."

Rothney, J. and Sanborn, M.P.,
1968

"One obvious reason for giving our gifted and talented children an optimal chance to develop their maximum potential is that now, and in the foreseeable future, we need leadership."

Olson, REPORT TO CONGRESS,
1972

". . .the longer that any talent or set of talents remains dormant and unused, the more confidently can it be predicted that the persons will never really use such potential talent in their entire lives."

Taylor, REPORT TO CONGRESS,
1972

"The greatness of a nation may be manifested in many ways-- in its purposes, its courage, its moral responsibility, its cultural and scientific eminence, the tenor of its daily life. But ultimately the source of its greatness is in the individuals who constitute the living substance of the nation.

Our devotion to a free society can only be understood in terms of these values. It is the only form of society that puts at the very top of its agenda the opportunity of the individual to develop his potentialities. It is the declared enemy of every condition that stunts the intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth of the individual. No society has ever fully succeeded in living up to the stern ideals that a free people set themselves. But only a free society can even address itself to that demanding task."

Gardner, J., 1958

". . .concerned people continue to persevere, because to each generation are born brilliant children to impress us with their talents. These children deserve proper help; society must have their trained minds. No social challenge offers so great a reward, whether it be the personal satisfaction of helping children fulfill their promise, or the social benefit from shrewd provision for the future. If enough of us realize how promising the gifted are, how they need sustained and special schooling, how varied successful stimulation can be, I am confident of progress."

Laycock, F., 1979

"Down how many roads among the stars must man propel himself in search of the final secret? This journey is difficult, immense, at times impossible, yet that will not deter some of us from attempting it. We cannot know all that has happened in the past, or the reason for all of these events, any more than we can with surety discern what lies ahead. We have joined the caravan at a certain point; we will travel as far as we can, but we cannot in one lifetime see all that we would like to see or learn all that we hunger to know."

Eiseley, L., 1959

"One of the problems with gifted child education is that the clientele is smarter than the practitioners."

Gowan, J.C., 1979

Conclusion

This handbook has presented six strategies to help you develop a formula for effective advocacy for gifted education. It would be humanly impossible for you alone to use them all. However, some of the suggestions can be used some of the time. And more of the suggestions can be used given more time. But what is most desirable is for you to locate your "handful of allies" and together you can join forces to design a plan to achieve your goals as active advocates of gifted education.